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Exec Linked to CIA Effort In Iran

By CAROLYN ACKER

A prominent Philadelphia businessman provided the cover story for an American spy who tried to recruit Abolhassan Bani-Sadr as a paid informer before he rose to become president of Iran, according to published reports.

The spy posed as a representative of Carver Associates, a Plymouth Meeting, Montgomery County, consulting firm owned by Don Meads, in three meetings with Bani-Sadr during 1979, according to a story yesterday in the Washington Post.

The Post story, and a similar account published yesterday in the Boston Globe, was based on secret documents captured and pieced together by Iranian revolutionaries who seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979.

THE DOCUMENTS, complete with commentaries in Farsi, the Iranian language, have been available to the public for months in paperback volumes sold at newspaper kiosks in Iran, the reports said.

Meads, 61, was the \$300,000-a-year chief executive officer and chairman of the board of CertainTeed Corp. in Valley Forge. He left suddenly in 1978 in an apparent dispute over the direction of the company.

Previously, he was the No. 3 man at INA Corp., a holding company whose principal subsidiary is the Insurance Co. of North America. A 1979 resume lists him as a corporate director of Western Savings Fund Society of Philadelphia and several nationally

known companies, including Perdue Inc., the Quaker Oats Co. and the Singer Co.

He is identified in the embassy documents as a "prominent U.S. businessman who has assisted ... in this capacity for several years," the Globe said.

MEADS, OF GLEN Moore, Chester County, could not be reached for comment. The CIA has been silent on the published reports.

"That's pretty incredible," remarked John Bunting, former chairman of First Pennsylvania Bank, who said he had known Meads "rather well" for 15 years.

"Everything I know about Don Meads is wonderful," said Bunting. "He's an attractive fellow, a bright fellow ... who will always land on his feet."

While Bunting first said he was "nonplussed" by the published accounts, he later said he would not be surprised if Meads, or any other "chief executive of a large Philadelphia corporation," had been contacted by the CIA.

"I had a kind of a relationship with the CIA," he said. "That's not unusual for the chief executive of a very large corporation to have talked to the CIA ..."

BUNTING RECALLED that shortly after he was named chief executive of First Pennsylvania, he was visited by a friend, calling to congratulate him on his new post. "I knew him as a very prominent person who then disclosed himself to be with the CIA," he said. The individual asked him to

notify the agency "if anything ever happens that was unusual" and he agreed, Bunting said.

"I thought he was trying to be Agent 007, and I was half-smirking, to tell you the truth," said Bunting. The former bank chairman said he never had occasion to contact the CIA.

Meads, a Dartmouth College graduate with a master's degree in business administration from Harvard, earned the Distinguished Flying Cross and six air medals as a Marine Corps pilot during World War II, according to a 1979 resume.

HE HAS SERVED on the board of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the International House of Philadelphia and is currently chairman of the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia, which President Reagan addressed at a luncheon last

October.

According to the Post, Meads knew Foster as Guy W. Rutherford, a CIA officer provided "deep cover" by his firm. But his true identity is Vernon A. Cassin, a now-retired CIA officer involved for years in Middle East espionage, the newspaper reported.

BANI-SADR, IDENTIFIED in secret cables as "SDLure-1," was to be hired ostensibly as a paid consultant to Carver Associates, although the real purpose of the mission was to secure a well-placed source inside the Iranian revolution, the Post reported.

The former Iranian president, now in exile in France, confirmed for the Post that an American matching Cassin's description did try to recruit him in 1979 as a business consultant for \$5,000 per month: "I told him to go away," he said.